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Civilians working at Fort Dix and McGuire Air Force Base, which are set to merge, will be paid same wages for same work.

Starting next month civilians working at Fort Dix and McGuire Air Force Base will make as much as their counterparts at Lakehurst Naval Engineering Station.

U.S. Rep. John Adler, D-3, Cherry Hill, announced Monday that the federal Office of Personnel Management agreed to increase the salaries at Fort Dix and McGuire.

"This change represents a significant step forward for the federal civilian employees who live and work in our neighborhoods and on our bases," Adler said in a statement. "I will continue to work on this issue to ensure a smooth transition. We need to keep these jobs in New Jersey."

While employees long have known of the discrepancy, the federal government recently learned of it while working to merge the three bases into the nation's only tri-service installation, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

Adler released a report in June detailing the difference in pay and passed a Sense of Congress to address the issue. The entire New Jersey congressional delegation also sent a letter to President Barack Obama asking that the civilian employees be paid the same.

The issue comes down to location and federal pay scale. Lakehurst, which is in Ocean County, is in the New York pay area. Fort Dix and McGuire are in the Philadelphia pay area.

Because of this, an employee earning \$52,398 at Lakehurst would earn only \$49,651 for the same job at Fort Dix or McGuire, a difference of nearly \$3,000.

Civilian employees hold a variety of jobs, including maintenance and clerical workers, grounds keepers, firefighters, mechanics, nurses and engineers.

Adler said the disparity is discouraging to civilians at Fort Dix and McGuire who do the same work but are earning less.

At the same time, he said employees at Lakehurst were concerned their salaries would be frozen until their counterparts caught up.

About 2,600 civilians are employed at McGuire and Fort Dix. The salary difference amounts to about \$3 million, which is a fraction of the more than \$650 billion federal defense budget.

With the Office of Personnel Management's approval, all employees will be paid the higher rate starting Oct. 11.

Col. Gina Grosso, commander of the joint installation, which is scheduled to be fully operational Thursday, applauded the office's decision.

"Ensuring equal pay is vital to the health of our civilian work force, and the passing of this rule signifies the importance of our civilians to the missions located here at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst," Grosso said in a statement.

"This rule brings flexibility. We can now effectively consolidate our civilian employees as needed without impacting their pay."